

AFRICA: AU calls for strengthening of local NGOs

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ADDIS ABABA, 7 December (IRIN) - African aid organisations are vital to combat crises like the one in Darfur to avoid delays from the international community, the deputy head of the African Union said on Sunday.

Patrick Mazimhaka said people in Sudan's troubled Darfur region had to wait months for help despite the UN branding it the world's worst humanitarian disaster.

"The reasons given were that there were no experienced NGOs on the ground through which aid could be given," Mazimhaka said.

His comments came at the launch of an international symposium aimed at building the capacity and resources of African NGOs.

"In every case, we are forced to appeal for outside assistance in the form of resources and organisation capacity to be able to respond in a significant manner," he said. "The level of support and the rapidity depends on factors we do not control."

Kingsley Amoako, head of the UN's Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), said it was critical that emergencies be linked to development. He added that all too often states emerging from conflict received little or no outside support.

He welcomed a new initiative by the UN to set up a US \$250 million facility to finance governments in "immediate post conflict situations".

"There is a clear need for international responses to crisis situations in Africa that are more forward looking," Amoako added. "They require that governments, civil society and the international donor community collaboratively work together to bring not only relief to conflict areas, but also work together effectively during the critical transition from relief to sustainable development."

The three-day symposium in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, is

addressing what role African organisations can play and how to tap resources from rich nations.

One conference discussion involved the topic of local aid organisations streamlining costs for efficiency and the advantages of utilizing local languages and customs. Ethiopian President Girma Wolde-Giorgis, who used to head the Ethiopian Red Cross in Eritrea during the 1980s, said Africans were taking charge of their own affairs.

"When I look back at the calamities that visited our beloved country over the years, I cannot help being deeply saddened," he told the conference. "I feel the pain and anguish of the victims as much as you do."
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